

## Chalkboard

Guest Author- *Bobby King*, Gentry High School Principal

I want to say that it seems just like yesterday that I came into the Gentry community and the Gentry School system, both of which have welcomed me with warmth, kindness, love, honesty, and above all, respect (THANK YOU). But I have actually started my eighth year in Gentry and there have been many new and exciting things going on during this time in and around the community as well as in the classrooms. My message today is about some of the programs and strategies that we are using here at the High School to improve your students learning.

The mission of Gentry High School, as it is for all campuses, is to have continuous improvement in the areas of Math and Literacy. The one major piece of data in determining school improvement is student learning, which is measured by our State Benchmark / EOC exams. Each year every teacher goes through several hours of in-service such as this year's, "Strategies That Work", "Literacy Lab" and "Book Studies", to ensure that they are using the latest teaching techniques and that students get the best instruction possible so that learning is taking place for all students. I will break down the two Priority areas, according to our School Improvement Plan, that we focus on each year and give some highlights into what we are doing to improve student learning.

Priority 1: Math (Algebra A/B) had been an area of weakness in the past so we have really focused on that for the last couple of years. We have looked at past test scores and student transcripts to come up with the current math (Algebra A/B) curriculum, which is the modified block (2 periods or 90 minutes). The purpose behind this is to ensure that students have a "mastery" of the basic Algebra fundamentals, which are the basis for being successful in the upper level math programs i.e.. geometry, algebra II and so on. Those students who are not working on a "proficient" (75%) level at the end of the first semester (Algebra A) will repeat Algebra A second semester. This has really been effective for us and we are going to continue it as long as the students are being successful. Another weakness that we found, based on test scores, is that students were having trouble reading word problems effectively. We are stressing reading in every content area this year, which I will address in the next priority, so that every student can become more fluent in their reading of word problems. Not only do students receive 90 minutes of classroom instruction, those that are not proficient on the Benchmark tests, are enrolled in a remediation math class where math fundamentals are stressed even more. If you might have any doubts to whether or not this has really been successful, our test scores in 2005 showed that we had 79% of our students score proficient or advanced on the Algebra EOC exam compared to 44% in 2004.

Priority 2: Literacy has held its own for the past couple of years with the strategies that were put into place back in 2003 like the "Step-Up-to-Writing" and "Writing Across the Curriculum" models. These programs were designed to improve the writing skills of all students in all content areas. We have seen success across the board with the students writing abilities and now need to shift our emphasis on reading across the curriculum, which shows to be one of our weaknesses on the Literacy EOC exam. Test scores have remained consistently the same the last few years with 44% scoring proficient or advanced in 2003 & 2004. However, we slipped to 42% in 2005. So, some highlights for our Literacy program include a group of English teachers going through the

Lit Lab training that stresses reading and lots of it, “Strategies That Work” which gives teachers new ideas and ways to present materials, and an increased AR book selection that covers all content areas so that students can read a book for English class that also can help them in say science class (a double whammy). Our goal is to involve every student in meaningful reading by using a variety of materials such as novels (short and long), magazines, newspapers, paperbacks, AR Books and of all things – textbooks. Research data shows that the more students read, the faster they become and the faster they become, the more that they comprehend and in turn become more fluent readers and lifelong readers. All of this goes hand-in-hand with everything that the teachers are already teaching and is ensuring that students become successful in life as well as lifelong readers. As with the Math program, we are working on a mastery program in the English program. Students must successfully pass English I before being enrolled in English II and so forth and so on. Students will not be allowed to enrolled in both English III & IV during their senior year because of the State required Literacy exam.

In closing, I just want to let you know that your support is ever so appreciated and that we are trying to do our absolute best to ensure that your children receive the best education possible that will prepare them to be successful in life.